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National Intelligence Daily (Cable)

6 March 1982

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CO NIDC 82-054C

6 March 1982

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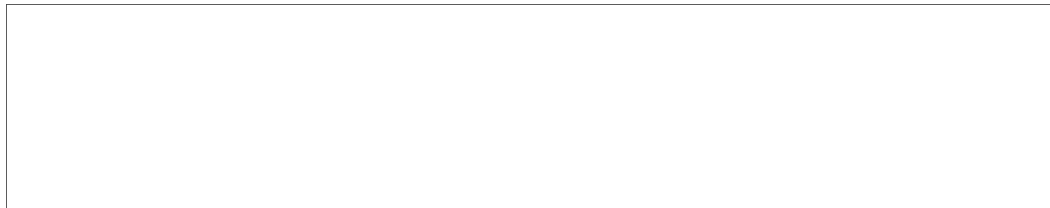
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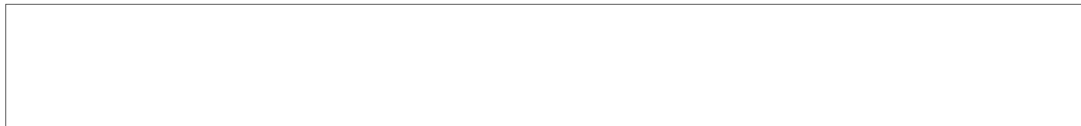
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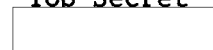


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PERSIAN GULF: Cooperation Council Meeting

Foreign Ministers of the six member-countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council will meet tomorrow in Riyadh--the fourth high-level session since January--to focus on ways to counter what they see as a growing threat from Iran. [REDACTED]

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Interior Ministers agreed last month to submit a draft joint security agreement to a Council summit in the fall. Saudi Interior Minister Nayif has even talked publicly about the possibility of the Council forming a rapid deployment force. [REDACTED]

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Comment: The Saudis and their allies clearly hope that a show of solidarity will impress Tehran with the determination of the Arab states in the region to resist threats. They probably also hope that any displays of increased US security assistance would act as a further deterrent. [REDACTED]

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INTERNATIONAL: Law of the Sea Conference Resumes

The 11th Session of the Law of the Sea Conference opens Monday in New York on a note of uncertainty over whether the US can succeed in reopening negotiations on the controversial seabed-mining texts of the draft treaty.

//The seabed-mining issue has been at the heart of the conference's stalemate since 1976, when it became entangled in the North-South debate over the need to establish a new international economic order.

Comment: //Resolving this internal conflict will be difficult for the G-77, which makes its decisions by consensus and has always spoken with one voice in the conference. Most G-77 members are reluctant to break ranks and jeopardize the discipline that has brought the group gains it has not been able to win in other forums.//

West Germany, Belgium, Italy, Japan, and France will strongly support the effort to bring the G-77 to the bargaining table and forge modifications in the seabed texts. These states, however, may not support all of the changes sought by the US. The UK will not do much more than inform the G-77 that it may not sign the treaty if the US does not sign it.

The USSR is showing far more flexibility than it exhibited in 1981, when it argued that negotiations were complete and that the conference should move to adopt the Draft Convention. The Soviets apparently believe that US participation in the treaty is essential to their interests. Moscow is informing conference officials that it is willing to consider further negotiations on seabed mining if the US demands are reasonable and do not conflict with Soviet national interests.

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POLAND: New Problem With the Church

The government yesterday for the first time sentenced a Roman Catholic priest to three and a half years in prison on the charge of slandering the authorities during a sermon in late December. The authorities also detained another priest, alleging they found a pistol in his residence that was used in the killing of a policeman. Before these developments, the Church and the regime had not pressed minor but potentially controversial issues in the interest of easing tensions. [redacted]

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Comment: The actions against the priests, which follow media attacks on the Church, will raise concern in the Church that some in the regime may be seeking a showdown. This concern could provoke the Church into reacting vigorously, if only to prevent the security services from believing they can with impunity implicate clerics in alleged crimes or in opposition to martial law. Tensions would be increased substantially if the regime were to move against priests and bishops who have aided Solidarity's underground activists. [redacted]

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AUSTRIA-POLAND: Influx of Exiles Anticipated

Austria is bracing for a possible influx of released Polish internees and their families. Since the Polish press report earlier this week that internees would be allowed to emigrate as of 15 March, about 50 released internees have applied for visas at the Austrian Embassy, claiming that they will be incarcerated again if they remain in Poland. [redacted]

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Comment: //Although Austria probably will accept the majority of Polish internees who wish to emigrate, officials will be sensitive to any implication that they are helping the martial law regime to exile dissidents. Vienna will try to share the burden by appealing to other nations to take refugees directly from Poland and to accelerate resettlement of refugees from Austria. Foreign Minister Pahr almost certainly will raise the issue during his visit to the US next week.// [redacted]

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USSR: Developments at Trade Union Plenum

The head of the Soviet trade union, Aleksey Shibayev, was removed yesterday, and the minister in charge of forest industries, Stepan Shelayev, was appointed to this important position that has sometimes carried Politburo status. Since the crisis in Poland began, the unions have been the target of repeated criticism from party leaders who have stressed the need to be more attentive to workers' interests. Although party secretary Kirilenko oversaw the last change in the union's chairmanship in 1976, party secretary Chernenko was the ranking leader at this plenum.

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Comment: The change demonstrates the leadership's efforts to make the trade unions more credible representatives of workers' interests, a theme that probably will be stressed at the trade union congress that opens on 16 March. Chernenko's role in the session yesterday indicates that he now has broader responsibilities for personnel policy, which will help improve his prospects for eventually succeeding President Brezhnev.

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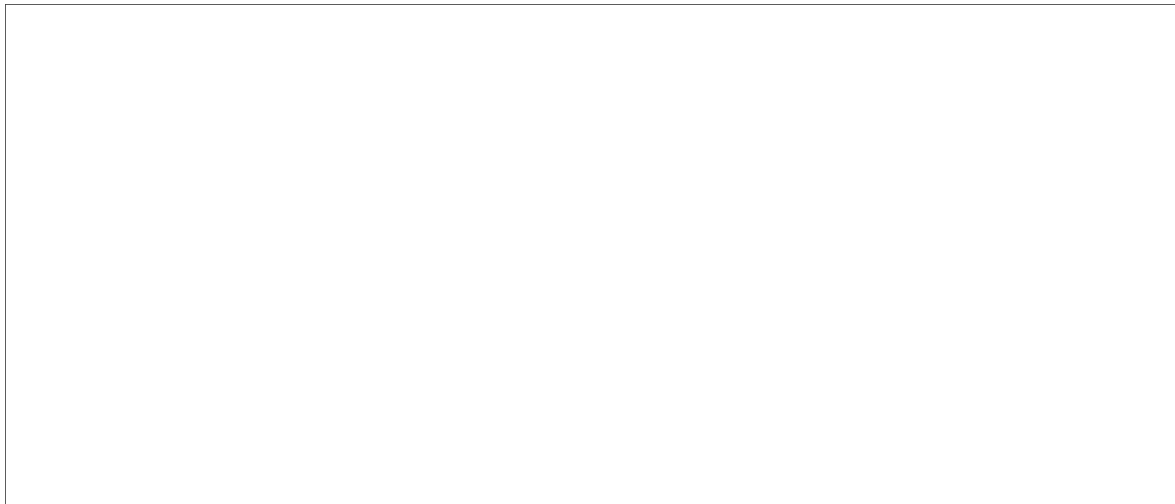
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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: Coup Attempt Fails

//General Kolingba's shaky, French-backed regime turned aside a poorly organized coup attempt on Wednesday by plotters allied with the main civilian opposition leader, Agne Patasse, who allegedly receives backing from Libya. 

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Comment: //Popular discontent with the regime's failure to solve economic and tribal problems and to announce a plan for a return to civilian rule could offer new opportunities for Libyan meddling. The government's problems also pose a dilemma for France, which helped install Kolingba in 1981 and which maintains 1,300 troops in the country to help guard against Libyan subversion. Additional unrest could diminish France's willingness to continue its support for Kolingba and cause Paris to push for civilian rule despite the risk that Patasse could gain power.// 

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